

**Madison County Interagency Coordinating Committee**  
**Alder, Montana**  
**October 6, 2008**

**Attendees:**

Dave Schulz	Madison County Commissioner
Tim Bozorth	BLM
Sue Heald	Forest Service
Tom Pruitt	FWS Ennis National Fish Hatchery
Bruce Ramsey	Forest Service
Ann Schwend	Ruby Watershed Committee and Madison County Planning Board
Marni Thompson	NRCS
Charity Fechter	Madison County Planner
Earl Stewart	Forest Service
Garry Williams	Montana DNRC
Jim Hart	Madison County Commissioner

**Discussion of 2008 Fire Season**

It was a normal to below normal fire season not only for Madison County but for the State. No fire restrictions were put in place.

The Forest Service reported that several EAs have won appeals. These are the Cowface, Antelope Basin and North Meadow. The Madison Ranger District had one prescribed fire that went well, though conditions are still dry.

The BLM completed fuel reduction projects north of Laurin and near Virginia City. There will be a 4000 acre timber sale in the Tobacco Roots that will be followed by fire reduction projects.

In Madison County open burning restrictions have been lifted. The Alder Fire Department will be taking responsibility for a larger area. Virginia City's fire department is working towards assuming fire protection responsibilities for the rural area around the town. There was a county-wide Fire Chief meeting. At that meeting they discussed working towards a county-wide partnership. Madison County is seeing greater demands put upon emergency response volunteers and needs to work closely with each volunteer group to lessen the burden.

Moonlight Basin: The Gallatin Canyon Consolidated Fire Department would like more support from Madison County. They are predicting there will be a second fire station soon. It was noted that the Yellowstone Club and Gallatin Canyon probably have the best equipped fire stations in the state.

**Wildlife Management**

The large population of whitetail deer in the area was discussed. There is a 10 by 5 mile corridor between the Bradley Ranch and Twin Bridges where 5000 deer were harvested last year with no sign of a drop in the deer population. At a meeting in Twin Bridges the State Veterinarian discussed the possibility of brucellosis affecting livestock. It was asked if deer carry brucellosis. The answer is there is a low probability. To try to minimize the number of deer vehicle incidents the willows along the highways are being cut back and deer crossing signs are being installed. Jim Hart asked if the deer population was down in the Madison Valley. It may be which is probably due to the hard winter.

A Cameron group is talking about the problem of wintering elk in the Madison valley. They are moving toward an agreement about special management hunts outside of hunting season and are working between other groups that include hunters, conservationists and ranchers.

It is being found that elk are moving further outside Yellowstone NP than what most folks thought. The Park elk are affecting more areas than just around the Park. Ranchers are feeling they carry most of the burden

for testing for brucellosis on both elk and cattle. The MT FWP have picked up on the need to do more testing and getting hunters to turn in the test kits that are provided with hunting licenses. The Madison Ranger District is a local collection point for the tests. There is a working group working on a brucellosis management plan that will be identifying the areas affected by Park elk.

The FWP is asking for help from livestock producers to get the tests out to the field. They aren't sure the tests are being done accurately by hunters. Nor does the FWP or the producers have enough money to do all the testing that needs to be done.

Ways of getting more tests to the public was discussed. Ann Schwend asked if she could get test kits to give to the public. Providing kits at the annual Hunter Feed is a possibility. The Madison RD will try to get test kits to give to hunters that come into the office or are contacted by Forest Service personnel on hunter patrol.

Dave Schultz talked about PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) Funding and Secure School funding. The PILT Funding is at 100% which is 350 million until 2012.

### **Round Table Discussion**

Garry Williams, DNRC: The DNRC is selling isolated lands to buy other lands. There is a 380 acre parcel north of the Ruby Reservoir they are interested in but the appraisal price was too high too high for Turner and has been suspended.

The purchase of a 5000 acre farm by Conrad has been finalized providing legal access that was a good deal for the State.

Montana Legacy West of the Divide is working to purchase Plum Creek properties. There are about 200,000 acres for sale. The State and Forest Service are working to acquire these lands too.

Hamilton Farms wants to trade 400 acres for 400 acres. The FWP wants to re-establish a fishing access site on the Big Hole River that washed out last spring. The only way Hamilton Farms will allow the access site is if the FWP pays for access and the land exchange goes through. DNRC doesn't feel the exchange is in the State's interest. The access site is not part of the exchange parcel. The DNRC and FWP are working on it.

A Land Use License has been issued for diversion of Madison River water onto Valley Garden. The West Madison Canal is the lead. The diversion project may be more than the landowners anticipate.

State of Montana Oil and Gas quarterly lease options: There are 150 parcels in Beaverhead County and 70 parcels in Madison County that are to be auctioned in December. Last June the O&G leases in Sweetgrass and Park Counties were the largest ever. The total sold netted about \$10M with \$2 to \$300 being the cost per acre. There was a lot of interest in the sale. Sage Grouse groups have been showing interests in the sales and may be raising issues.

The Montana States Transmission Intertie 500kV Project is drawing comments from Sage Grouse groups. The DNRC won't be involved in the project until the final stages. Tim Bozorth discussed the power line route in general and noted that it would not go through the Madison Valley.

The fire budget was discussed. The DNRC has been authorized to buy 24 more chassis for loaning to volunteer fire districts. That is in addition to the 15 bought regularly. They may be able to replace 40-50 vehicles to upgrade volunteer engines.

Earl Stewart, Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF: Discussed the project of work. And effort is going into the Vegetative Management where 15 to 35 million board feet of timber are to be reduced in the next couple years. There are about 12 allotments that are in the process of being updated.

Charity Fechter, Madison County Planner: There are seven River Fund Projects funded by PPL, four of which are on the Madison River. The top projects are:

- Windy Point – access site
- Cherry Creek – an acquisition with both the FWP and BLM being involved

- Reynolds Pass – to develop a new hand carry access
- Aquatics Species – this was determined to be more of another fund

All projects are to be considered by the board with a determination in December.

A wildlife overlay map being created for the County will show what land is suitable for what development will be parcel specific. It will have agency contacts. The Planning Board is developing mapping to show where development can be planned.

Marni Thompson, NRCS: The Environmental Citizen Program has spent \$251,000 with five landowners on grazing and other improvements. \$919,000 is to be spent on weed control in the County in the next six years.

The new Farm Bill is not ready yet.

The Wetland Reserve Program is working on easements to restore wetlands.

Seven local cows were successfully taught to eat Canadian thistle with the intention that they will in turn teach their calves to have a taste for the same. The project is getting attention because it is easy to train cattle to eat weeds by slowly adding ground weeds to their feed. Other counties have expressed interest in learning the process and landowners are positive about the program.

The Woodson intensive Grazing Project is in its last year of study.

There was a Sage Grouse tour in Twin Bridges.

Ann Schwend, Ruby Watershed Committee and Madison County Planning Board: The Governor's Range Tour was a great success. There were 150 people in attendance in the Upper Ruby. Lots of projects were discussed and she has been getting good feedback from the attendees. The only disappointment was that Governor Schweitzer could not attend.

The Ruby Dam Restoration project is looking at raising the spillway by four to seven feet. The dam has sedimented in and is now only meeting 85% of contracted water needs. The DNRC is the lead on this project.

The 319 DEQ funded projects relating to ground water: She is currently working on prioritizing water quality projects. One is the Sauerbeir Feedlot Reclamation and the moving of the corral.

The FWP found five age classes of grayling in the Upper Ruby.

They are doing wetland and riparian mapping.

On the River Resource Day there were 120 kids.

Bruce Ramsey, Forest Service: Out of 3.4 million acres of trees on the Beaverhead-Deerlodge NF 1 million are infested with beetles. The B-D is working to protect houses adjoining the Forest. The Forest is doubling the timber projects.

The B-D is trying to stay ahead of fisheries projects. They are finding that non-native species are invading the creeks. When updating range allotment management the fisheries are important.

The Forest Plan Record of Decision may be ready in December.

Jim Hart, Madison County Commissioner: Discussed the nursing home project in Madison Valley.

The Varney and Blaine Bridges are back on the State list for repairs.

The Madison Valley RFD may be putting a new station by the fish hatchery.

The Ennis airport is being extended by 1900'. It should be completed by November, 2008. The Twin Bridges airport is also slated to be extended in the next few years.

The Facilities Advisory Committee is reappraising the courthouse facility. There isn't enough room for County employees and several buildings are in bad shape.

Tom Pruitt, FWS Ennis Fish Hatchery: The budget is under a continuing resolution until March. The hatchery is looking at a 10% to 15% reduction in their budget. That will leave them about \$56,000 in the hole.

There is a cutthroat virus at the hatchery. New technology is finding that it is a common virus. Once fish get it they're resistant to other diseases. The hatchery is addressing the situation which is non-fatal.

They are getting feedback on how they operate and how to reduce costs. The hatchery will no longer be providing fish to stock out-of-area Kid's Ponds.

Whirling disease has been found in Hegben area in the South Fork of the Madison River. They are stocking with resistant rainbows. They are also doing an experimental stocking of resistant trout in Deep Creek by Townsend.

There has been good success with Grayling with streamside incubators. The incubators may begin to be used throughout the State due to the success.

Sue Heald, Forest Service, Madison Ranger District: The Travel Management Plan EA will be out soon. There aren't a lot of changes.

There are a couple of small land exchanges happening on the District; one in the Tobacco Roots involving mining patents and another in the Madison Range near Braxton/Jumping Horse Ranch.

The District has hired Tim Bennett as a Grizzly Bear Educator. He will be working full time on issues such as food storage.

The District missed the opportunity to use the County hired helicopter to spray weeds due to lack of notice. In the future there needs to be an agreement in place with the County to coordinate aerial weed spraying.

They've been getting comments about the dead timber on the District. Due to it being a lower priority than some projects and low budget the District won't be seeing many fuel reduction projects. Fuel reduction education is needed for the landowners on how to create a defensible space around their homes and buildings.

The NRCS would like the District's help working on the weed problem on Forest Service land in Norwegian Creek while landowners deal with the weeds on private lands.

Tim Bozorth, BLM: The new Special Recreation Use Permits on the Madison River went well this season. Twenty-four outfitters have signed up. He will be attending an end of season meeting with FWP to talk about the permits. Next year the BLM will be focusing on enforcement of regulations. Fees from the permits are due by year's end.

The BLM is working on fixing up Windy Point access site. At Storey Ditch access site the road has been graveled, the parking area fixed up and an outhouse and jack rail fence are still to be installed.

Aerial spraying at Storey Ditch went well. The weed eating sheep are coming down and are camped around Storey Ditch.

At the Palisades Campground has had a powerline put in. By 2010 the boat launch will be reconstructed.

Watershed Assessments are being done in the Rochester and East Bench watersheds. The Western Watersheds Project, an environmental group, is becoming active in Montana and has a new office in

Missoula. The BLM expects to have both the Rochester and East Bench watershed assessments appealed by them. The grazing permits in Madison County have been renewed for the next three years in anticipation of the appeals

Work on the timber sale in the Tobacco Roots is continuing. There should be 2000 acres up for sale in the spring.

There has been a Timber Trespass in the Meadow Creek area. The BLM law enforcement ranger is working with the sheriff on the trespass.

The removal of juniper in riparian areas mechanical treatment has been completed in most of the areas targeted. The BLM will be looking to see what areas will need to be reseeded.

The scoping comments for the Montana States Transmission Intertie 500kV Project are due on October 10. Tim was going to attend a meeting October 6 in Cardwell about the project.

There is a brook trout removal project going on in Greenhorn and Dark Hollow Creeks. The Turner Ranch will put in a barrier at the bottom of the creeks to keep brook trout from returning.

There have been access issues in Cold Creek. Landowners are accessing without legal right-of-way and are causing problems with neighbors and BLM.

Dave Schultz, Madison County Commissioner: Acknowledged all the volunteer and agency help during the Hebgen Dam Incident. There were to be more articles in the Madisonian Newspaper about the actions taken by everyone.

The County will be replacing the Cherry Creek, Coy Brown, South Boulder and Bear Creek bridges using grant money. It will be about an \$800,000 project.

The County will be considering charging Impact Fees which will make new development pay for the public services and emergency response services they will use. This is a new model for the State.

The Commissioners are trying to figure out what to do with the County facilities. Both the Pankey house and school in Virginia City are unsafe and the courthouse is too small. For the long term building is the solution. But where to put them? There is a possibility the new building could be outside of town on State or BLM lands.

The squared pavilion at the County Fairgrounds is historic and the bottom logs need to be replaced. The pavilion also needs a new roof.

A 1.8 million dollar expansion is being considered at the Sheridan nursing home. The project will bring the building up to code and make repairs. It will also provide a new kitchen, dining, laundry, and administrative space.

The County is looking for comments on the Seyler, Lewis, and Duncan bridges for access to rivers within the County road right-of-way.

Last summer's hail storm caused one million dollars in roof damage alone. A Secretarial Declaration for Disaster has been declared regarding the crops damaged in the storm.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held January 15, 2009 at 1:00 at the Madison Ranger District.

**\*\*Note:** The next meeting has been changed to January 22, 2009, at 10:00 a.m. at the Madison Ranger Station.